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SUBJECT: US SUPREME COURT JUSTICE MEETS WITH LATVIAN LEADERS

**¶11.** (U) Summary: At Ambassador Bailey's invitation, US Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito visited Riga to participate as the keynote speaker at Embassy Riga's conference on Judicial Ethics, Transparency and Reform. During his stay, Alito met with President Vaira Vike-Freiberga and Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis. The discussions centered around the rule of law and the state of the Judiciary and how Latvia and the United States can further their cooperation in these areas. End Summary.

**¶12.** (U) In his July 2 meeting with President Vike-Freiberga, Alito heard praise for US efforts to assist Latvia's justice system over the years. But, reflecting on what had been achieved and what remained to be done as she neared the end of her eight years in office, the President identified many areas where she believed cooperation would continue to be of value. She highlighted the need for continuing education for judges and the challenges of a relatively young judiciary with lifetime appointments, and no performance review mechanism, as challenges for Latvia. Drawing on her own experiences as a psychologist, she felt that Latvian judges did not consider the nature of the accused and the crime in passing sentence. Prison time for drug dealing and child exploitation offenses are very short or waived entirely, she felt, while minors were not given conditions of imprisonment that would promote their rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society. Justice Alito noted that we faced many of these same issues in the US and in judicial systems around the world. Conferences like this help by sharing new solutions to common problems, noting in particular the US experience with enhanced sentencing guidelines. Both agreed that strong sentences are essential in fighting corruption, with Alito reminding that it has only been in the last 20 years or so in the US that we have consistently applied that principle. The President also noted infrastructure concerns in the Latvian judicial system. More courtrooms would reduce pre-trial delays, she asserted, and new and better prisons were needed for more humane treatment of the incarcerated.

**¶13.** (U) In his July 3 meeting with PM Kalvitis, Alito was told that it was essential to build public trust in the judiciary in Latvia, especially following the Soviet period where courts were viewed as an instrument of repression. Alito agreed that his is essential in a democracy, and an area in which also the US could do better. But the Justice said he took heart from the entries in the Embassy-sponsored essay contest for the judicial conference, which showed young people in Latvia with a real sense of the role of the judiciary in a democracy. The PM also noted the need for a judiciary able to handle the most complicated cases involving corruption and financial crimes and asked for US help. Alito, drawing on his experience as a prosecutor, said it was also very important that the laws governing such crimes and investigations be modern and flexible to allow the prosecutor to follow the trail wherever it leads. As he had with the President, Alito also stressed the need for tough sentences to increase the perceived cost of corruption. The PM agreed, noting that many of Latvia's laws on

economic crimes dated from the mid-90's and could stand to be updated.

¶4. (U) Justice Alito did not have the opportunity to clear this cable prior to departure.

BAILEY